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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV LO BH

SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA'S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER ON THE WESTERN BALKANS

REF: STATE 11928

Classified By: Charge Eddins for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Slovakia's new Foreign Minister, High Representative and EU Special Representative to Bosnia Miroslav Lajcak, wants to maintain a strong focus on the Western Balkans in his new role. In a February 11 initial meeting with Charge, Lajcak also mentioned that he had intended to visit Washington after the March PIC steering board meeting (in his High Rep capacity) and made clear he is still interested in pursuing a visit to discuss bilateral issues, but also to discuss the Western Balkans. On Bosnia, Lajcak's message was simple: the international community should either strengthen and support OHR or close it. With respect to Kosovo, Lajcak made clear that there was no political will in Slovakia for a near-term change in policy. That said, his personal view was that Slovakia's non-recognition of Kosovo had weakened its (Slovakia's) position in the EU and NATO. In both cases, consultations with Russia were essential. We will report septel on other topics, e.g. Ukraine, energy security and transatlantic relations. End Summary.

Bosnia: OHR a "Dead Horse" Without Support

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¶2. (C) In response to Charge's question about the search for Lajcak's successor in Sarajevo, FM Lajcak mentioned -- without offering names -- that there were five candidates, including a very strong one from the UK. But, he cautioned, the international community (the West) should take care to bring Russia into the consultative process early. Lajcak recalled the skirmishes and delays surrounding his own appointment in 2007 because this hadn't happened. His successor will need a clear mandate, he added, and without Russian buy-in, Lajcak fears that won't be possible.

¶3. (C) Lajcak complained about a "lack of vision" in the international community's approach to Bosnia. On the one hand, there is reluctance to close OHR, but on the other hand it isn't working. Lajcak recalled his use of the Bonn powers in 2007. He said that after the Bosnian Serbs complained and Belgrade and Moscow kicked up a fuss, "I looked behind me and only the U.S. and the UK were there. I had become part of the problem." Lajcak believes the status quo in Bosnia is damaging both the country and the international community. While many believe Bosnia is not ready for OHR's closure, OHR is a "dead horse" unless it has strong support from the international community.

Kosovo: Don't Expect Any Changes

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¶4. (C) Lajcak opened by saying that he hoped the U.S. understood that there is no support within Slovakia for Kosovo recognition. The fact that the only Slovak political party that favors recognition is the ethnic Hungarian party only complicates matters. Lajcak admitted, however, that he

was personally not happy with GOS policy because he believes that it has weakened Slovakia's position in the EU and NATO. (Note: During a February 10 press conference, Lajcak reiterated current Slovak policy toward Kosovo, but did not exclude the possibility that it could be revisited during his tenure.)

15. (C) Lajcak then repeated his mantra about consultations with Russia, recalling his warnings to Marti Ahtisaari and others about the strength -- and potential consequences -- of Russia opposition to the Kosovar independence. Lajcak said it was foolish to ignore a "no" at the beginning of a process, only to be tripped up by it at the end. Comment: Lajcak clearly sees his experience in the Balkans as a asset that could set him apart (above) in the eyes of his international colleagues (despite Slovakia's size and importance). While he appears to be realistic about his chances for an early meeting with Secretary Clinton, he made clear that he hopes to leverage his value-added Balkan expertise to move himself up in the queue. End comment.

EDDINS